



The making of Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead*

# DEEP IN THE WOODS

## BAD WEATHER AHEAD

"I wanted to be a meteorologist in the seventh grade," said director Sam Raimi to *Fangoria*. "I took a meteorology course. Then I wanted to be an airplane pilot. Then I took one of those pre-SATs in junior high school. They told me to forget about it, that I should be a handyman, a guy who trouble shoots washing machines. So I started making Super-8 movies, but I never thought you could really do it as a profession."

It wasn't until college that Raimi changed his mind. "I was in college studying literature and history and of course forestalling a career trying to make as many movies as I could. I was expecting to drag out my college years and then take a real job doing something else. And then Rob [Tapert] said, 'Why don't we make a feature film, since we seem to be doing it in Super-8?' I thought, 'The poor sap doesn't realise it isn't possible. I'll play his game until he finds out, because I'd hate to be the one who says no.' But we talked about it more and more over long nights in the apartment. Finally we got evicted because we were playing our Super-8 movies too loud. It was either find another apartment or go into the movie business." Raimi dropped out of college to set up Renaissance Productions with high school friends Robert Tapert and Bruce Campbell.

The three friends made a 30 minute Super-8 version of *The Evil Dead* called *Within The Woods* to show to potential backers. "We'd make people sick then ask them to invest," said Raimi. They made them sick enough to part with \$430,000. And Sunday 11th November, 1979 cast and crew headed for the hills.

## SHOOTING THE DEAD

The Tennessee Film Commission had scouted isolated locations for the production but when Raimi, Tapert, Campbell and the small cast and crew of friends arrived on set they found the cabin they had intended to shoot in was unavailable. They made do with another cabin outside of Morristown but it was in such a bad state that it took eight days to repair. "The place was covered with six inches of cow dung," says Raimi. "We had to shovel cow dung out for a week." While some of the crew shovelled shit, the rest shot the opening driving scenes.

Worse was yet to come. Raimi's shooting style — described by crew member Josh Becker as "hyper-meticulous" — was causing the production to fall

behind. Often Raimi would spend hours shooting an insert shot while failing to cover the scene with a master shot. To add to the cast and crew's irritation most of the shoot took place at night in freezing temperatures.

But Raimi's approach yielded results. His inventive camerawork made *The Evil Dead* stand out from the horror crowd. "We couldn't afford a Steadicam," said Raimi, "so we improvised. We mounted the camera in the middle of a 2x4 about 15 feet long. A couple of guys grabbed it, one on either end, and they just ran like hell." As Josh Becker observed, "Theoretically it's not a bad idea, although in practice Rob [Tapert] kept smashing into trees."

Cast and crew soldiered on until January 26th 1980. After completing principle photography most of the actors left the production. However, there was still much of the film left to complete. Raimi was left to finish the second half of the film with Bruce Campbell, and various stand-ins (or "shemps") replacing the actors who left.

## HAIL TO THE KING

*The Evil Dead* almost didn't get released. Every major distributor passed on Raimi's gore-fest (even Paramount who had just released *Friday the 13th*). Raimi had just about given up hope when Stephen King saw the film at the 1982 Cannes Film Festival and published a glowing review in *The Twilight Zone* magazine titled "The Evil Dead — Why You Haven't Seen It Yet... And Why You Ought To." King says, "What Raimi achieves in *The Evil Dead* is a black rainbow of horror," praising his simple story, effective zombie make-up and exhilarating cinematography. King even took a shot at Stanley Kubrick (*The Shining* — 1980) saying of Raimi's fluid camera work, "Somebody ought to tell Kubrick, Spielberg et al that there's really nothing to this stuff. Just bolt the camera to a 2x4 and run like hell." Raimi told *Fangoria*, "Stephen King helped immeasurably. We were just another little horror picture, and it could have remained that way, until he said, 'No, I like this picture. It's different to the others.' He put a spotlight on it." Thanks in part to King's attention, and the success of the film overseas, Raimi signed a US distribution deal with New Line Cinema. The rest, as they say, is horror history. The film became a cult classic which inspired two sequels and launched Sam Raimi on the unsuspecting world.



**Thursday Nov. 15th 1979**

"So, yesterday was our first day of filming... My first job of the day was attracting the attention of some bulls that were attacking Tim and Sam as they shot the long shot from a field across the street. I just sang some songs and the whole herd moved to the other end of the field."

**Friday Nov. 16th**

"Things are running well. The cast does what they're told, the only bitching comes from Theresa, but no one ever listens."

## Booklet of the Dead

Josh Becker's diary of the making of *The Evil Dead*

**Saturday Nov 24th**

"Dissension among the cast and crew seems to be building."

**Thursday Nov. 29th**

"Our director is a first rate mess. He is sleeping at the cabin (someone has to since all our power tools were stolen) and seems to get more frazzled and less organized by the day.... Everyone including myself is a fried out wreck. This production is taking it's toll."

**Friday Dec. 21st**

"Rob, Sam and I smoked some pot and talked and Sam related filmmaking to being a magician. He said the only thing a magician is thinking about while performing is, "Do they know I'm doing this trick?" If they don't, he's succeeding — period. The point also isn't just to make the film, it's to amaze yourself and everyone at the same time. If you think what you're doing is neat, chances are everyone else will too."

**Sunday Dec. 2nd**

"I have serious doubts about the completion of this film."

**Monday Dec. 17th**

"Soon we'll be leaving for the location again and once again I'm dreading it. Last night was unquestionably the coldest yet, possibly zero and just absurd weather to be doing extensive exteriors in. Aside from the fact that it's awful to be out in personally, both lights and cameras resent it too - the Arriflex BL freezes up regularly now and has to be thawed by the fire."

The night before last tension between cast and crew and head honchos almost came to the boiling point. I can't finish this now, Sam just told me I have to go."

**Monday Dec. 10th**

"I spent today watching and logging the rushes. It took me eight hours to watch eight reels and after that my mind was numb. The ulterior motive for my spending the day watching the rushes is that 12,000 feet of film is missing. I did not locate any of it."

*The Evil Dead Journal* by Josh Becker is available now as part of *The Evil Dead* DVD from Big Sky Video.

**Till dismemberment  
do they part.**